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STUDIES IN EUROPEAN CULTURE AND HISTORY

# MEMORY AND POSTWAR MEMORIALS

Confronting the Violence  
of the Past

Edited by  
Marc Silberman & Florence Vatan



CHAPTER FOUR  
BEYOND AUSCHWITZ? EUROPE'S  
TERRORSCAPES IN THE AGE OF  
POSTMEMORY

*Rob van der Laarse*

"Orange visits Auschwitz!" reads a Dutch newspaper headline on June 6, 2012, shortly before the start of the Union of European Football Association's (UEFA) Championship in Poland and Ukraine, referring to the visit of the national football team to the Nazi concentration camp in Poland. The young, international sportsmen were deeply moved when entering the gate of Auschwitz I and walking along the ramp of Birkenau. Some players called it an "unbelievable" and "indescribable experience," an impression confirmed by photographs made by invited press agencies.<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, only a month earlier during the commemorations of the Second World War in the Netherlands on May 4–5, a comparable media hype occurred when the well-known deejay and artist Ruud de Wild went to Auschwitz with his crew. The idea had come up shortly after Holocaust Memorial Day, January 27, with a "spontaneous" call-out during his weekly radio broadcast. While chatting with one of his sidekicks, De Wild told his listeners that his nine-year-old daughter had asked him what he knew about Anne Frank. Never having visited the Amsterdam Anne Frank House, this made him think: "Shameful, I've not even been in a concentration camp. And I've done really everything!" Explaining his own ignorance by an unwillingness to share his emotions "with an old mister with 200 medals putting down a floral wreath," he made a decision. De Wild phoned an enthusiastic star of the popular Dutch TV soap series *Good Times/Bad Times* and asked her to join him on a visit to Auschwitz, "if you dare," while suggesting that her agenda watchers would now think: "Well, Camp Auschwitz, that's not something to say no to!"<sup>2</sup>

Entering the iconic gate of Europe's heart of darkness and crossing the still existing symbolic mental border of the Iron Curtain seemed to have



become a trend among Western Europe's rich and famous. This might certainly be regarded as a success for the so-called Stockholm Declaration of the International Forum on the Holocaust of January 2000 in which 44 world leaders declared the Shoah to be the main challenge of Western civilization, suggested that its cruelty and magnitude should be "forever seared in our collective memory," and vowed that new genocides should be prevented by research, education, and remembrance to "plant the seeds of a better future amidst the soil of a bitter past." Five years later the UN General Assembly supported the mission of the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research (ITF) with the recommendation of an annual Holocaust Remembrance Day on January 27, the day of the Red Army's liberation of Auschwitz, which seems to have become an important agent in the transnationalization of the Holocaust.<sup>3</sup>

Yet Auschwitz's role as the universal symbol of the Holocaust was for a long time not as obvious as one might think. In contrast to the earlier Soviet discovery of Majdanek on July 23, 1944, Auschwitz's liberation did not attract much attention, while nowadays January 27 still has no relationship to the Jewish-Israeli calendar of Holocaust remembrances.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, testimony at the first Nuremberg Trial (1945–1946) as well as the Polish Auschwitz Trial (1947) pointed to the significance of Auschwitz-Birkenau's gas chambers, and the camp figured prominently in what might be regarded as the first Holocaust movies and novels such as Wanda Jakubowska's film *Ostatni etap* (*The Last Stage*, 1947) and Primo Levi's witness story *Se questo è un uomo* (*If This Is a Man*, 1947). Nonetheless, during the Cold War the Polish State Museum in Auschwitz (1947) was basically considered to be a communist propaganda site. Of course Elie Wiesel's *Night* (1960) and the Eichmann trial (1961–1962) brought Nazi Germany's largest Jewish death camp back into Western memory, but Auschwitz's iconic meaning as the Holocaust's paradigm camp dated really from the American TV miniseries *Holocaust* (1978), Alan J. Pakula's Hollywood movie *Sophie's Choice* (1982), and Claude Lanzmann's French documentary *Shoah* (1985).

Although the Age of the Extremes, terrorized by Nazism, communism, and civil war, seems to have finally ended with the fall of the Berlin Wall, the shock of the Srebrenica massacre in 1995 opened the public's eyes to the possibility that history does repeat itself. The unusual call for military intervention, framed in Western Europe and the United States from the perspective of the atrocities of the Nazi concentration camps, was symptomatic for the new symbolic role of the Holocaust. While the memorialization of the First and Second World War had developed up to then mostly along national and often nationalist lines, the Yugoslav War of the

1990s saw the European Union embrace the Holocaust memory boom as a mnemonic policy grounded by the assumption of a painful, unique, and shared past of universal value. Following the earlier development of national war and resistance museums, most Western European countries have since the 1990s established Holocaust museums, memorials, and commemoration sites, and implemented compensation laws for families of Holocaust victims and survivors. Hence, the dynamic of Holocaust memory is rooted as much in European experience as it is in the globalized mediatization, universalization, or Americanization of the Holocaust. As such, the Auschwitz paradigm strengthened not only the European Union's inward consolidation but even more its eastward expansion, because after the EU's enlargement between 2004 and 2007 from 12 to 27 member states the recognition of the Holocaust as a collective, painful past also functions for this New Europe as an entry ticket to a supposed "European community of memory."<sup>5</sup>

Yet how European is this community? Remarkably, while celebrities of Western Europe discover the east during their Holocaust travels, their Eastern European counterparts are questioning the Western dominance over Europe's collective memory. Thus on March 15, 2012, more than 200,000 Hungarians were protesting in Budapest, led by their young Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and with the support of hundreds of Polish and Lithuanian nationalists, against what they called a Western "international occupation." Similar to the Hungarian revolt of 1848 against the Habsburg Empire and the 1956 revolt against Soviet occupation, the Hungarian masses now seem ready for a revolt against the European Union! "Hungary will not be a colony of the EU," was the headline for an astonished Dutch journalist's newspaper article on the Hungarian leader's Budapest speech.<sup>6</sup> Orbán's fierce message is not only that the center of Europe has moved to the East, but also that the time has come for Eastern Europe's strong Christian nations to rescue the weak and decaying continent from its Western, humanist degeneration. This geopolitical shift is reflected in the 2008 Prague Declaration on European Conscience and Communism, which—as an alternative to the Stockholm Declaration—demands of the European Union the "recognition of Communism as an integral and horrific part of Europe's common history," the "acceptance of pan-European responsibility for crimes committed by Communism" to be dealt with in the same way the Nuremberg Tribunal did with Nazi crimes. It also asks for the establishment of August 23—the day of the signing of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact—as a day of remembrance for the victims of both Nazi and Communist totalitarian regimes comparable to Holocaust Remembrance Day on January 27.<sup>7</sup> This so-called double genocide doctrine was adopted one year later by a European Parliament

resolution that recommends a "Day of Remembrance for the victims of Stalinism and Nazism" and declares the crimes of communist terror and occupation to be as important as the Holocaust for Europe's collective memory. Though the origin of this reinvented totalitarianism thesis goes back to Václav Havel's dissident humanism, after its adoption with German Christian Democratic support by the leaders of the Viségrad Group nations (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia), it seems now to have been hijacked by nationalist and populist politicians in Central Europe and the Baltics with a much less pro-European agenda. In that sense one may say that De Wild's fascination for an Eastern "Auschwitz experience" and Orbán's fear of a Western cultural occupation perfectly illustrate the Holocaust dissonances between the East and the West.<sup>8</sup> For while Eastern Europe presents itself as suffering from two regimes of terror lasting from 1939 to 1989, Western Europe only suffers from a self-proclaimed "guilt of nations" after replacing its heroic war and resistance narratives with transnational memory works.<sup>9</sup>

So we may ask: is not the European Union's and ITF's mission of Holocaust education, remembrance, and research as strongly, politically, and ethically biased as the Prague Declaration? And what about the use, misuse, and abuse of the Holocaust or Auschwitz paradigm by present-day politicians, media personalities, and memory makers? Put differently, is the Holocaust paradigm really all-embracing, universal, and global, or should it be understood as a dominant narrative, competing with other war experiences, mnemonic spaces, and memories? Indeed camps and memorials often tell competing stories about the meaning and lessons of the twentieth-century "age of extremes" to different, if not conflicting heritage communities.<sup>10</sup> As I will show, the EU's call for shared values not only demonstrates the success of Holocaust memorials and museums in attracting new *visitor* groups but it also demonstrates their appeal to new *victim* groups, sometimes even perceived as perpetrators in the eyes of others.

### Mediated Visibility, Memory, and the Politics of Heritage

Marianne Hirsch has labeled as "postmemory" the visual attraction of victim photos for a second, postwar generation without living memories of the camps. Following Jan and Aleida Assmann's conceptualization of the transmission of "communicative memory" embodied within the family into "cultural memory" stored in archives and communicated through literature, museums, and performances, Hirsch suggests a comparable development for the mediation of war experiences. This public transmission of embodied experience should be best mediated by photos of people that "can persist even after all participants and even their familial

descendants are gone." The specific "fluidity" of portraits, private photos, and personal objects would, according to her, be made possible by the power of the familial gaze to shape the visitor's ability to mutually understand and identify, as exhibited in new memorial museums "like the Tower of Faces in the US Holocaust Memorial Museum."<sup>11</sup> Although the tower in the Washington DC museum might not be as familial as its name suggests, since the upper portraits are invisible to visitors, the presentation of faces of lost Jewish inhabitants of one massacred Lithuanian village is a strong device for anyone who wants to imagine the impact of the Holocaust on a human scale. As such, this implicit reference to the long "forgotten" Eastern European "Holocaust by bullets" might work as powerfully as the piles of human hair and shoes of the anonymous dead in the showcases at Auschwitz's State Memorial Museum in Oświęcim.<sup>12</sup> Nonetheless, I would stress the equally important role of the historic location itself for mnemonic installations at in situ memorials such as the entire 1.9 square kilometer complex of Auschwitz I and Auschwitz II in Birkenau. Here more than portraits alone, the mediated interaction of photos, objects, and places produces strong, embodied identifications of present visitors with past victims by pervasive, spatial experiences.<sup>13</sup>

Using the emotional narrative of the family's photo album for public display, Holocaust museums and memorials have become popular destinations especially for a younger generation without personal memories of war. Harold Marcuse notes that the largest group of first-time camp visitors at the former Bavarian concentration camp of Dachau around the turn of the millennium were "the 1989er children of the 1968er parents," visiting the memorial camp for a personal experience of "the War as history," known only from school, film, and television.<sup>14</sup> Growing up with public witness stories transformed into visual, mediatized memory, the second- and third-generation visitors have a powerful influence on the staging and restaging of Holocaust sites.<sup>15</sup> While many traces of past violence have been lost, some of these painful places haunted by the past have been "rediscovered" by a new generation through the mediation of photography, literature, film, and new media. Postmemory in that sense is closely related to the logic of globalized visibility in the media age.<sup>16</sup> Centered around the Holocaust, as Levy and Sznajder noted, the mnemonic practices of the global age are often spatially localized in heritage sites shaped by the cultural dynamic of the tourist gaze.<sup>17</sup> Transforming locations into destinations, they reconstruct the past for present needs by giving historical objects and places a second life as heritage. Instead of simply showing things, these destinations produce "glocal" Holocaust experiences, competing with each other by staging authenticity for the tourist market.<sup>18</sup> Beyond their function as tourist destinations, however, Holocaust sites are also appropriated by

heritage communities, varying from survivor groups to complete nations. The crucial significance of Holocaust sites is therefore their value for identity politics, strengthening as well as transcending old local boundaries and national borders in a context of Europeanization and globalization. But as the product of war and conflict, heritage seems contested almost by definition: the same sites often tell different stories for different people. That in the former European landscapes of Nazi occupation more and more contradictory experiences and memories are absorbed into the orbit of the Holocaust narrative should therefore not obscure how many painful and "difficult" memories have been silenced and "forgotten."

A first case in point is *Polizei-haftlager Frøslev* (Police Prison Camp Frøslev) in Southern Jutland near the Danish–German border. Promoted as "an unambiguous memorial to German occupation and Danish resistance," in contrast to what visitors might expect, this camp had never been a brutal Nazi concentration camp, let alone a Jewish transit or death camp. Unlike Norway, Belgium, or the Netherlands, Denmark had never been officially occupied. The Danish all-party, unity government stepped down only in 1943, after which the country was informally governed by the German Foreign Office. The Wehrmacht sent about 1,700 Jews, Communists, and "asocial" persons to Neuengamme and other German concentration camps, but as a result of the government's "politics of negotiation," the —Danes— succeeded in preventing the deportation of several thousand resistance fighters, most of whom were imprisoned from 1944 near the —German—border in Frøslev, which was run by the German Security Police in Denmark.<sup>19</sup> When Frøslev was transformed into a memorial to Danish resistance in 1969, the memorial museum silenced its *postwar* function as an internment camp. Renamed Fårhus or Faarhus (1945–1949), it was reused immediately after the war to imprison collaborators under the aegis of the former resistance movement by turning former prisoners into camp guards. Like in other countries, horror tales about the severe treatment of former fascists and collaborators were soon circulating. In the Danish case, however, these postwar "losers" combined a "wrong" ideology with an oppressed ethnicity, since most of them belonged to the German minority of Southern Jutland (Northern Schleswig), where one-fifth of the male population fell victim to a legal "purge." Although many of these *Volksdeutschen* (ethnic Germans living beyond the borders of the Reich) had hoped for a German *Anschluss* by border correction during the Third Reich, they oppose still today their postwar treatment as "traitors" by arguing that Denmark had never been officially occupied!<sup>20</sup> So Frøslev, the heroic symbol of national resistance, became as Fårhus a painful symbol of exclusion. Although after a redesign in 2013 the museum is telling the postwar story in an outbuilding, the competing narratives of Frøslev/Fårhus are still integrated within

the powerful message of the site, framing the German–Danish minority's oppression of 1945–1949 in the context of its wartime Nazification and collaboration.

A second case in point concerns the Buchenwald and Sachsenhausen concentration camps located in the former East Germany. Already in 1995 Sarah Farmer noted that their post-1989 reconfiguration was being planned by West German curators and historians. Owing to the complex postwar dynamics of memory, she argues, these site-based memorials demand different hermeneutic approaches than the usual war museum.<sup>21</sup> Patrizia Violi similarly points to the active role of "trauma site museums" in the memory politics of postconflict societies because "trauma sites are in this respect much more powerful semiotic devices than any other kind of memorial site, since they already exist as genuine signifiers and testimonials of the past inscribed in the urban landscape, and deeply embedded in their wider historical and cultural context."<sup>22</sup> Yet often local meanings and contrasting representations of the past among different communities remain within the framework of a powerful, Western-authorized heritage discourse, embodied by official instruments and institutions such as United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) World Heritage Convention (1972) and the above-mentioned Stockholm Declaration.<sup>23</sup> While mostly "forgotten" in West Germany in the first decades after the war, Nazi concentration camps became heroic sites of antifascist resistance in East Germany. After the collapse of the GDR, however, they were transformed into sites of atrocity according to the Western Holocaust paradigm. In addition this victim-oriented narrative soon came to include more than only Holocaust victims. After the discovery of mass graves in the surrounding forests in Buchenwald and Sachsenhausen, communist and Jewish spokespeople for Nazi victims were challenged by a competing commemorative group of spokespeople for the prisoners killed in the camps under Soviet administration after 1945. Comparable to the victim perspective of Denmark's German minority, the relatives of these victims (former perpetrators in the eyes of the Nazi victims) were claiming in the 1990s access to "their" sites of commemoration. Only after years of bitter rivalry a historical commission (dominated by Western Germans) recommended a spatial separation of routings on these same memorial sites for Holocaust and communist victims and their relatives. Indeed, this might be considered a first step on the road to a European recognition of the crimes committed by communism.

Similar confrontations, though along other historical lines, have taken and are taking place in many former Nazi concentration camps inside and outside Germany, often resulting in spatial and hierarchical competition among victim groups, with Jewish Holocaust victims at the highest and



postwar internees and postcolonial residents at the lowest rank. In many Western European countries a blurring between the categories of heroes, victims, and perpetrators has occurred. In Denmark, for example, Lars Breuer and Isabella Matauschek note that in the media the 1990s victims' perspectives have recently broadened to include heretofore unrepresented groups in the national master narrative of a heroic moral nation, such as former Eastern Front volunteers and Danish National Socialists.<sup>24</sup> In the Netherlands as well the official "Nationaal Comité 4–5 Mei" supported a similar broadening of the category of Dutch war victims commemorated on Remembrance Day, May 4, to all fallen soldiers fighting *against* and *with* the Germans. However, the boy who won the Committee's war poetry competition in 2012 with an empathetic poem dedicated to an uncle who died as a Waffen-SS foreign volunteer at the Eastern Front had to withdraw after public protest. The role of the 23,000 Dutch Waffen-SS volunteers, who outnumbered all other non-German soldiers in the Nazi war against the "Judeo-Bolshevik conspiracy," is simply incomprehensible as victimhood in the Western Holocaust narrative.<sup>25</sup> This might also explain why the only monument to the Dutch SS is located in Estonia, the Baltic country where also in 2007 the communist national liberty monument of 1945, the so-called Bronze Soldier of Tallinn, was relocated together with the remains of some Red Army soldiers to a Russian war cemetery. Notwithstanding EU and US protests, Estonian nationalists had erected a counter monument, relocated in 2005 to the privately owned Museum of Fight for Estonian Freedom in Lagedi, commemorating "their" fallen soldiers in a bronze bas-relief of a freedom fighter with a German *Stahlhelm* and machine gun.<sup>26</sup>

If public opinion is still strongly divided on the issue of commemorating national "traitors" and Holocaust "perpetrators" as legitimate victims, Dutch–German commemorations at the grass roots level are hardly criticized. Such "reconciliations" conform to the European memory politics of shared values but are still unthinkable at former camp sites where—in contrast to museums and symbolic monuments—specific place-bound memories are at stake. Thus many second-generation "war children," emotionally attached to places marked by the footsteps of their lost relatives, cannot accept the idea of being confronted at such shrines of their family's identity with competing victim groups such as the Dutch "children of wrong parents," meaning former collaborators, who present themselves in the media as still not being "liberated" 65 years after the War.<sup>27</sup> And a recent proposal of some third-generation German historians to transform Frøslev into a bi-national, Danish–German memorial site, likewise would not make sense if it ignores the competing memories attached to the conflicted site.<sup>28</sup> Neither Buchenwald's alternative commemoration of Nazi

and Soviet victims nor Frøslev's choice to tell the story of Fårhus in one of its outbuildings will be able to reconcile different, if not opposing, memories of "victimhood." Therefore, the present director of the Frøslev Camp, Henric Skov Kristensen, states that no matter what politicians propagate about shared values and human rights education, museums should opt for authenticity and truth-finding.<sup>29</sup> Visitors and victims must simply accept that historical research is not meant nor able to bridge the gap between competing narratives of a complicated and painful past. But what about the museum's active role in Denmark's politics of memory? This hardly seems compatible with historical criticism, and even if it might be true, as Kristensen thinks, that in the future the question of authenticity will become more important than the question of who owns the place,<sup>30</sup> the rules of authenticity have always been dictated by the politics of identity because it really matters if one restores a barrack according to its function and appearance *in or after* the Nazi occupation.

### Competing Narratives in "Conflict Time"

If Western heritage professionals are staging (or are willing to stage) competing stories at the same site by means of spatial redesigns and routings that integrate different memory groups and attract new visitors to former camp sites, such "multidirectional" experiments are still unthinkable in many Eastern European, postconflict societies.<sup>31</sup> Not having experienced decades of Western Holocaust education, Hollywood movies, or a German model of coming to terms with the past (*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*), former communist countries are still witnessing memory wars, which—in contrast to most Western countries—might equally be understood as *afterlives* of violence as well as *preludes* to violence. Such was certainly the case during the 1990s Yugoslav war, as the example of Jasenovac Memorial Museum might show. In this former Ustaša concentration camp (1941–1945) known as the "Auschwitz of the Balkan"—a complex of satellite camps spread over 200 square kilometers including the notorious Stara Gradiška concentration camp in the Croatian borderland of Slavonian Krajina—approximately 80,000 to 100,000 people were killed according to current records, including at least ca. 47,000 Serbs, 10,000 to 13,000 Jews, 6,000 to 10,000 Roma, and 6,000 to 12,000 Croats.<sup>32</sup> This is a large number that nonetheless contrasts sharply with the alleged 500,000 to 800,000 Serbs, Jews, Roma, and "antifascists" killed there, according to the former communist regime and to many Serbs still today.<sup>33</sup> Thus the almost sacrosanct number 700,000 for Serbian nationalists is nowadays projected on large screens in Gradina Donja, another part of Jasenovac's former killing fields across the Sava River in Republika Srpska.<sup>34</sup>

Although such an up- and downgrading of Nazi victims, or more generally inflating of one's own dead and reducing the numbers of others, is typical for many camp narratives in postcommunist Eastern Europe, the exposure of ethnic violence had not been typical for Titoism. Tito's early postwar policy of "brotherhood and unity" was aimed at silencing and forgetting by putting history on ice. Cleansed of all its barracks, Jasenovac's pastoral memorial park expressed the bloody past of the Ustaša camps in "Tito style," as does Bogdan Bogdanović's impressive Stone Flower monument (1966), symbolizing light and hope without any explicit reference to the horror and terror at the historical camp site. The Memorial Museum's first permanent exhibition, which was opened to the public in 1968, prioritized the operation of the Ustaše camp with the help of artifacts, documents, and mail sent by prisoners. There were no photographs of corpses, massacres, knives, or other attributes used for killing. During a visit by a delegation of the Serbian Academy of Arts and Science in 1985, however, there were complaints that the exhibition did not show "some first-class documents." Shortly thereafter, on the eve of the Yugoslav war, the Jasenovac Memorial Museum's policy of memory changed completely when its "true story" was presented in a new permanent exhibition (1988) that explicitly showed torture and slaughtered human bodies in detail on a frieze containing large-format photographs.<sup>35</sup> The permanent exhibition was accompanied by a travelling exhibition, "The Dead Open the Eyes of the Living" (1986–1991), which in a visual narrative comparable to the Allies' "shock therapy" in former Nazi Germany for the first time revealed the cruelty of the Nazi crimes. It aimed to show Nazi war crimes to soldiers at army barracks of the Yugoslav People's Army by means of hundreds of photos of massacres and dead bodies, shot at Jasenovac and other sites during the Holocaust and arranged according to rules of propaganda instead of education.<sup>36</sup> According to Nataša Jovičić, the current director of Jasenovac Memorial Museum, the 45,000 documents of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in The Hague indicate the traveling exhibition's popularity at Serbian military bases in the late 1980s. Milošević and many other war criminals mentioned it in their testimonies to justify their actions. When they saw "what they [the Ustaša] did to us," they responded in terms of what Tony Judt has labeled the power of the "they-did-it-to-us" model by claiming: "they committed war crimes, and now it is the other way around!" Relating maps with comparable locations of the 1980s exhibitions and the 1990s "rape camps," Jovičić suggests a direct link between the hatred evoked by the photos of dead bodies in Jasenovac and Croatia's Homeland War (1991–1995).<sup>37</sup>

More than merely symptomatic of existing tensions, this contested "trauma site museum" played an active role in the ensuing conflicts.

The Museum became the focus of what anthropologist Stef Jansen calls "memory-centered narratives of distant pasts," paradoxically shared by Serbs and Croats, both playing the card of historic trauma while claiming to have "liberated" themselves "forever" from a "thousand years of oppression."<sup>38</sup> Violating the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, first Franjo Tuđman's Croatian army and then paramilitary Serbs from the rebellious Republic of Krajina occupied Jasenovac Memorial Museum in fall 1991, and finally the Croatian military surge of Operation Storm (1995) "liberated" the site. Jasenovac was by then severely damaged; part of its looted collection was taken to Bosnia and later sold to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), and another part was transported by Serbs to Belgrade. Thus the Belgrade Museum of Genocide Victims (1992) presented in 1997 the exhibition "Jasenovac – A System of Ustaše Death Camps" to prove the "genocidal tendencies of the Croatian people," accompanied by a 122-page catalogue with many photos and documents from the original Jasenovac collection.<sup>39</sup> If Serbs were taking revenge for the "Serbian Holocaust" of 1941, Croats were taking revenge for what they called the "Croatian Holocaust" of 1945. For when Jasenovac's "truth" was revealed in the late 1980s, at almost the same time the long tabooed "truth" about Serbian Chetniks and the massacre of surrendered Ustaše, Bosnian, and Slovenian troops in the Carinthian refugee camps of Bleiburg and Viktring in May 1945 were debated and commemorated for the first time. After this the shame of Jasenovac was replaced in Croatia by a new victim perspective centered on Bleiburg, and according to Croatian revisionists, the number of deaths should have been far higher than that of Jasenovac, now downgraded to 35,000, even though Tuđman—as a former partisan general—distanced himself from this "numbers game" by claiming an equal number of 50,000 deaths for both camps. In the 1990s Austrian Bleiburg became Croatia's new national commemoration site, visited by families openly dressed in Ustaše uniforms.<sup>40</sup>

So how does one present the Holocaust in this kind of museum? How does one present trauma without producing another terrortscape and genocide? While both sides accused each other of genocide, they also offered new challenges for historical debate and the politics of reconciliation. Since 2002 both Belgrade's Genocide Museum and Jasenovac Memorial Museum have distanced themselves from nationalist revisionism. In particular after the Tuđman era in Croatia the German approach to *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* has become a model in the Europeanization of its politics of memory.<sup>41</sup> After being redesigned under Croatian management and reopened in 2006, Jasenovac Memorial Museum found the answer about how to treat a complicated and contested past in ITF frames:



it presents stories, objects, and images so that the public can feel and comprehend “the terror of the crimes” by stressing that they were committed against “tens of thousands of individuals” rather than presenting an anonymous “mass of bones and blood.” In contrast to the former ideological manipulation of numbers and photos, the Museum no longer shows images of dead bodies to its visitors in order to prevent a spiral in which “victims of one war crime be utilized to incite another.” Awarded international prizes for its design and educational projects and supported by the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial in Jerusalem as well as the USHMM in Washington, it now seeks to evoke a visitor’s identification with “victims as individuals” whom one can look in the eyes by means of portrait photos and personal and family names, “rather than just an anonymous mass reduced to the group term ‘victims.’”<sup>42</sup>

Yet why has this “Europeanized” museum been criticized not only by Serbs but also by Western commentators? Despite its support from the USHMM, even the ITF has condemned the Jasenovac Memorial Museum’s “individualization of victimhood” because it neglects ideological backgrounds, the ethnic identity of victims and perpetrators, and reprises the earlier neglect of the site’s history in the spirit of Bogdanović’s symbolic Stone Flower (Figure 4.1). The director of the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Jerusalem described the new exhibition in 2006 as “postmodern fog,” and the German ambassador in Croatia had advised Jovičić earlier “to show the historical events as truthfully and tangibly as possible” in order to prevent a repetition of history, because a younger generation without familial memory of the Holocaust would not be able to understand what had happened there by looking at an abstract stone flower.<sup>43</sup> These Western organizations seem to agree with the Croatian-Jewish author Julija Koš. According to her 2010 “Information letter to the ambassadors about poor Exhibitions on Jasenovac Museum,” she had been replaced as a member of the Museum’s governing council by “a more obedient member” because of her critical interview in *Novi List* under the title “Such a museum in Jasenovac should be closed,” immediately after the opening in 2006. Demanding changes in the permanent exhibition, she quoted in her open letter four years later the presidents of the Jewish communities in Serbia and in Croatia, who in 2007 and 2009 publicly protested against the diminishing of “the truth about the Ustashe regime” as “just one step from denying of the crime done in Jasenovac.”<sup>44</sup>

In my view this is a good example of “dyschronia.” Using portrait photos as a technique for visitors’ identification, the Jasenovac Memorial Museum imported a successful Western model of representation. However, it is the product of a specific postwar dynamic of Holocaust memory, one that becomes highly contested in a postconflict society where every story is



**Figure 4.1** Bogdan Bogdanović’s Stone Flower monument (1966).

Source: Photograph by Damir Kalogjera, 2003. © Jasenovac Memorial Site.

distrusted. We are, in other words, dealing with contrasting historical and educational approaches to presenting conflicted pasts in a museum context. While Western memorial museums such as the Police Prison Camp Frøslev and Buchenwald concentration camp use, or claim to use, competing historical narratives to challenge authorized national resistance myths by integrating new victim groups, the Jasenovac Memorial Museum seems to adopt the EU’s policy of shared values to prevent new ethnic hatred.

Nonetheless, the reason why Hirsch's notion of postmemory—as transmitter of familial values to public, cultural memory by means of portraits—has not been very successful in bridging the gap between former victims and new visitor groups is directly related to the political need for a “dehistorization” of the genocidal past under the umbrella of a Europeanization or universalization of the Holocaust. This might also be the reason why Nataša Mataušić, a spokesperson for Jasenovac Memorial Museum, denies in her public reaction to Julija Koš's criticism any influence of Yad Vashem and the USHMM, for these museums “were not built at the crime scene,” and their exhibitions are therefore of a “different nature” than “the contemporary museum presentation of the crime” attempted at Jasenovac.<sup>45</sup> As a result, the museum claims to present “the trauma of Jasenovac” in a scholarly, cultural context by focusing not only on stories about the Holocaust but “about all crimes committed as a result of national, religious or political intolerance during the existence of the Independent State of Croatia.”<sup>46</sup> Confronted with the question of how to present a painful heritage, Croatian professionals, like their colleagues in Denmark and Germany, choose to establish “clear, indisputable facts.” Opposing decades of ideological manipulation, however, they opt to seek truth only in the individualization of victims, not in the presentation of forensic evidence of the mass killings, nor by moving beyond Bogdanović's abstract flower and rethinking the museum's own role in Yugoslav memory politics and the 1990s conflicts. In other words, the mechanisms of postmemory are used to silence traumatic memories in the interest of reconciliation; but as the progressive Croatian writer Slobodan Šnajder notes, what works for the Berlin Holocaust Memorial does not necessarily work for a contested concentration camp—and a much better inspiration for Jasenovac than Yad Vashem or the USHMM might have been post-1995 Buchenwald.<sup>47</sup>

This brings us back to Sarah Farmer's argument that, because of the dynamics of memory, site-based memorials demand different museological approaches than “normal” memorial museums. Precisely because it ignored competing memories with regard to historical events, the role, motives, and background of victims and perpetrators, and above all spatial evidence of what happened at the still existing crime scenes, the Jasenovac Memorial Museum lost contact with its heritage communities. This is the case not only for those Serbs unwilling to accept the downgrading of “their” martyred victims, it is equally the case for Jewish survivors and their relatives who insist on the antifascist paradigm. Thus, on his visit to Jasenovac in 2010 Israeli President Simon Peres explicitly referred to the silenced photos of dead bodies and the Ustaša way of killing while stating that this camp differed from all others “because it was not only for Jews” and because of “the level of brutality as well.” Referring to the infamous

Ustaše knife, which was no longer exhibited after 2006, he added that it was “unimportant if one person or 100,000” died in this way. Forgetting all policies of shared values, Peres claimed that Jasenovac was “a demonstration of sadism.”<sup>48</sup> This speech—preceding Croatia's entry in the European Union—signaled the ongoing sensitivities in the unavoidable path of Croatian-Israeli rapprochement. In the process of internationalization Bleiburg lost its function for Croatia's politics of memory, and Jasenovac once again was of crucial importance. It harks back to the election of the liberal dissident Stjepan Mesić as president in 2000, after which Croatia broke with the Catholic nationalist purity politics of the Tuđman era and declared itself a modern, independent nation with no connection to the fascist Ustaše state whose symbols and uniforms were prohibited in public. This policy continues under the current social democratic president Ivo Josipović who warned in 2011 against “attempts to drastically reduce or decrease the number of Jasenovac victims,” while prime minister Jadranka Kosor insured that “the Croatian government decisively rejects and condemns every attempt at historical revisionism and rehabilitation of the fascist ideology, every form of totalitarianism, extremism and radicalism.”<sup>49</sup> Posing as “the son of a Titoist partisan,” Josipović also expressed his “deep regret” for Tuđman's support of the Croat-Bosnian war and even visited with the leaders of Republika Srpska and Bosnia the “Serbian” memorial site at Sijekovac that commemorates the 1992 killing of around 50 Serbs by Croat and Bosnian army units. Croatia's president also went to Israel in 2012 to apologize for the Jews killed by the Croatian Ustaše regime during the Second World War, thereby suggesting a further strengthening of the Israeli-Croat ties within the context of Israel's need for peace with the Palestinians.<sup>50</sup>

Both Peres's and Josipović's veiled messages about the silencing of “others” indicate that not only Europe's political integration but also Israel's existence is based on the assumption of shared collective memories of a common traumatic past. Yet at the same time the assumption of the Holocaust as a common experience, and hence as a basic part of Europe's postwar identity, raises serious objections. As we have noted, at many former terrortscapes the violent reality of the Holocaust was a complex phenomenon that still generates conflicting emotions and competing narratives. At traumatic sites in Jutland, Croatia, and hundreds of other places, from official war memorials to “forgotten” traces, people experience what Britt Baillie in her research on the Dudik Memorial at Vukovar (Croatia) labels “chronocentrism,” referring to a specific notion of time as “conflict time.”<sup>51</sup> Conflict time has an extremely long staying power that will potentially never end and can be reawakened by sudden conflicts after long periods of forgetting. This is how old names create new meanings

by referring to traumatic moments and places. Although presented as "age old," these mnemonic scenarios should not be regarded as legitimate, subaltern narratives of repressed memories, but rather they can be better understood as dynamic constructions of memory using "the past" for present purposes. Invented traditions to secure unique birth lands for one's kin mediate in that sense between familial, embodied experiences and narratives of collective memory that may end up as institutionalized master narratives with a sacrosanct character like political religions. If this process of *intergenerational* group formation and *transnational* nation building leads in normal times to storing memory in public institutions, such as schools, archives, monuments, and museums, in conflict time these imagined communities may claim symbolic spaces as an exclusive heritage to be defended against any claim of "others."

### Terrorspaces in the Age of Postmemory

Because the topography of Nazi and communist terror left a much deeper imprint on European memory culture than generally thought, we might expect that the EU's enlargement since 2004 with the addition of many postcommunist nations would lead to a transformation of Europe's politics of memory. Although Oświęcim is located in Poland, the "shadow of Auschwitz" is perceived less intensely in Eastern than in Western Europe. Indeed, given the growth of Euro-skepticism in Great Britain and other countries of "Old Europe," one might assume reduced support for a "Holocaust-centered, European mnemonic community."<sup>52</sup> Such heritage conflicts and competing memories cannot be resolved by top-down European declarations and legal procedures because instead of reconciliation they can just as easily feed new wars of memory. Therefore we may better search for a fundamental rethinking of the interpretation, presentation, and representation of the Holocaust to be grasped from a transnational comparative perspective. Rather than assuming that the Holocaust is a common European experience, I suggest we consider the idea of a fluid interaction of the history, memory, and heritage of war, terror, and occupation during Europe's "age of the camps."<sup>53</sup> We should also consider in our "age of post-nationality" a further disintegration of old master narratives in a cacophony of Holocaust dissonances.<sup>54</sup> Driven by conflicts, competition, and identity politics, all sorts of shattered traces of lost or silenced terrorspaces—whether Bleiburg, the Buchenwald mass graves, or thousands of "forgotten" Jewish grave yards—will be rediscovered and brought back into memory as traumascapes, memoryscapes, or touristscapes.<sup>55</sup> Besides transnational shared meanings they will yield new media events and memory wars because "memory events" such as the conflicts at

Frøslev or Jasenovac are not unique as historical events; they are repetitive, like rituals or modern TV soaps, as Alexander Etkind remarked, staged by directors of memory "who lead the production of these collective events in the same way as film directors make their films."<sup>56</sup>

While some politicians in the geopolitical center of the former Balkan wars show remarkable statesmanship in bridging the ravines of hatred, others do not hesitate to play as usual the card of historical trauma. As a result, Europe's expansion to the east creates critical tensions that fundamentally challenge the Holocaust paradigm. The enlarged continent seems on the one hand to have gained many new terrorspaces, while on the other many postcommunist states are neither willing nor able to handle their traumatic war and postwar experiences in terms of a Holocaust master narrative. With regard to phase differences in coming to terms with past terror and occupation in different parts of Europe, we may therefore question the use of Western postmemory techniques for a musealization of the Holocaust in postconflict societies where "real" and "authentic" are more than catchwords for a postmodern consumer's experience.<sup>57</sup> A touristic framing of Nazi camps and massacres, experienced with a mixture of fear and courage similar to the white man's travel to the heartlands of Africa as imagined by Joseph Conrad, seems typical only for Western Holocaust visitors. Meanwhile local visitors, in particularly in Eastern Europe, are often dealing with markedly different emotions when visiting such places of shame and pain. For them authenticity is strongly related to personal memories of atrocities, a "never-ending story" of violence, and to new confrontations with the mnemonic claims of others who quite often appear to be their neighbors, rather than to postmemory by means of personal photos, objects, stories, and travelogues of "erased" communities.<sup>58</sup> Thus, as we saw, in the Balkans still recovering from the 1990s war, the past is not a foreign country but on the contrary still far too familiar.

How will this affect the future of the Holocaust paradigm? This is not an easy question to answer, for the Holocaust has changed from a historical trope into a moral imperative with sacrosanct numbers and lessons to draw. To understand its semantic power and weaknesses, I suggest we return to Oświęcim while at the same time moving beyond Auschwitz. Given the many tensions between local war memories and a universalizing, imperialistic Western Holocaust paradigm, we should take into account the specificity and complexity of local contexts when speaking about "the" Holocaust. The cases I point to also demonstrate that a universalization of local stories is accompanied by an appropriation of such master narratives by site-based memorials situating themselves on the European Holocaust map. In this dialectical sense the plea "Auschwitz, never again," voiced by the dying Martha Weiss in the final scene of *Ostatni etap*, has become an antifascist



metaphor for universal trauma as well as an international marketing device for local Holocaust experiences, unrepeatable in "normal" museums. This packaging of trauma, which relates Western and Eastern Holocaust experiences, is in my view masterfully depicted in Jáchym Topol's novel *The Devil's Workshop* (*Chladnou zemi*, 2009) when the young Czech protagonist, the best guide of Terezin Memorial Museum, encounters an angry girl from Belarus who cynically suggests that he should attract Western tourists to her country, where the devil had his largest workshop: "They say all death camps were in Poland! That's bullshit! All the tour operators only got to Auschwitz! But that's going to change because the world never saw camps like we had here in Belarus."<sup>59</sup>

### Notes

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17. Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider, *Erinnerung im globalen Zeitalter: Der Holocaust* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2001), 36–39.
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42. Jovičić, "Jasenovac Memorial Museum's Permanent Exhibition," 297.
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## PART II

### STAGING MEMORY